

VZCZCXRO4046
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLU #0784 3571255
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 231255Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY LUANDA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5868
INFO RUEH KI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 1047
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUANDA 000784

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2019

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SUBJECT: ANGOLA-DRC BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETS, PUTS OFF
RESOLUTION OF HARD ISSUES

REF: LUANDA 776

(U) Classified by CDA Jeff Hawkins, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) A cabinet-level delegation led by DRC Minister of International and Regional Cooperation Raymond Tshibanda traveled to Luanda December 15-17 for a meeting of the binational commission between Angola and the DRC. The two sides discussed a range of bilateral issues at the ministerial and vice ministerial level, including land and sea borders, immigration, transportation, oil exploration, energy production, and a project to link Angola's Cabinda enclave to the rest of Angola by a highway running through Congolese territory. The talks, part of a regular framework of binational exchanges, took place in a context of heightened tensions between the two countries over a round of tit-for-tat expulsions of Congolese and Angolan nations that began last October and Congolese claims to oil-rich waters off Cabinda. The GRA's public comment on the meetings has been blandly positive, with Foreign Minister Assuncao dos Anjos telling the Angolan press that the talks were productive and promoted "harmony and good neighborliness."

¶2. (SBU) In a December 23 meeting with Charge, Ministry of External Relations Director for Africa and the Middle East Nelson Cosme stuck closely to the GRA's public line. Alarm about the state of relations between the two neighbors was misplaced, Cosme explained, the ambiance during the meetings was cordial, and the countries had clearly defined mechanisms for dialog over contentious issues. However, Cosme went on to say that many of the tough issues, particularly the thorny question of maritime boundaries and division of petroleum resources in the Gulf of Guinea, would only be decided after further study. A group of experts would meet in the first semester of 2010, he said, to attack the question of offshore resources. In the meantime, Angola was not sharing oil or revenues with the DRC from the disputed zone. On the issue of Angolan citizens residing in DRC, Angola planned to negotiate a tripartite agreement between the GRA, the GDRC, and UNHCR about the repatriation of Angolan citizens from DRC, which would take place over the next two years.

¶3. (C) Comment. As reported reftel, the Angolan interest is likely best served by having the joint maritime boundary issue languish in an interminable round of commission meetings, and we suspect this is the tack the GRA will take. The proposed agreement to repatriate systematically Angolans living in DRC is potentially of concern - as many Angolans living in exile initially left Angola because they supported the opposition during the civil war - but the participation of UNHCR in the process is reassuring. End Comment.
HAWKINS